MEDIA AND POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING DURING THE AGGRESSION ON GAZA: A NARRATIVE ANALYTICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This study investigates the mutual shaping of media narratives and political decision-making during the 2023–2024 Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip. Adopting a hybrid descriptive-analytical and qualitative design, it analyses Arab, Western, and Israeli media content alongside semistructured interviews with 15 experts in media, politics, and international relations. The findings reveal a consistent pro-Israel bias in major Western outlets, manifested through selective framing and terminology that marginalizes Palestinian perspectives. The research underscores the media's dual role in documenting events and constructing political narratives that inform policy, while noting the rising influence of alternative and social media in challenging mainstream discourse despite censorship and disinformation. Overall, the study demonstrates that media and political decision-making operate as interconnected processes shaped by ideology, strategic interests, and geopolitical dynamics.

Keywords: media bias, political decision-making, Gaza conflict, narrative framing

Introduction

The relationship between media and politics is deeply intricate and continuously evolving, particularly within the context of global conflicts. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which encapsulates a host of political, ideological, and humanitarian tensions. In such conflict settings, the dynamic between media and politics becomes especially consequential, influencing not only the public narrative but also the broader political landscape. This study examines that dynamic, with specific reference to the recent Israeli military campaign known as the "Al-Aqsa Flood," and considers how shifts in both media practices and political strategies reflect and reinforce one another (Abdullah &Jumaa Mohammed, 2017).

Media functions as a powerful mechanism in shaping public perception and influencing sociopolitical outcomes. From the earliest phases of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, media coverage has served both to expose on-the-ground realities—such as human rights abuses against Palestinians—and to manipulate public discourse, particularly through deliberate narrative construction by Israeli authorities aimed at swaying international opinion and policymaking (Abdel Qader Abdel Aali, 2023). The capacity of media to shape opinion and influence decisionmaking has only intensified in the digital age, making critical engagement with media sources more necessary than ever (Mustafa Ahmed Hassan et al., 2024).

The interconnectedness between political systems and media outlets is not static; it adapts in response to technological developments, geopolitical shifts, and changing public expectations. Understanding this evolving relationship is key to unpacking contemporary political and media transformations, especially in regions plagued by protracted conflicts.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the most enduring and multifaceted disputes in modern history, transcends the boundaries of conventional warfare. It intersects with cultural, religious, and territorial disputes that have led to the systematic displacement of Palestinians over generations (Mu'in Bseiso, 2014). Central to this conflict is the battle over narrative—

how events are framed and disseminated to global audiences. Media plays a pivotal role in this process, often portraying developments through selective lenses shaped by political interests (Suleiman Murad, Awda et al., 2015).

During the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, media coverage became a battleground in itself. Journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens leveraged digital platforms to document the reality on the ground, triggering international reactions to Israel's actions (Farajallah Rashid & Abu Al-Azayem, 2023). This moment illustrated that media does more than report; it can influence policy decisions, amplify marginalized voices, and catalyze global advocacy efforts (Nabil Mohsen Badr Al-Din, 2023).

Moreover, new media technologies have fundamentally reshaped how information is produced, shared, and consumed. Platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram have enabled decentralized reporting, often bypassing traditional media gatekeepers. Citizen journalism, live streams, and podcasts have given rise to more nuanced perspectives and challenged monolithic narratives. However, this decentralization also presents new challenges to political actors who once monopolized information flows. The resulting media environment has heightened global scrutiny of the Israeli government's actions while also serving as a venue for counter-campaigns, including coordinated disinformation efforts and algorithmic manipulation by pro-Israel entities.

This research contends that a deeper understanding of the media-politics nexus—especially as it plays out in real-time conflict—is essential for scholars, policymakers, and media professionals alike. The study's focus on the Al-Aqsa Flood operation offers a unique lens through which to explore how competing narratives shape perceptions and policy in volatile contexts.

This study's theoretical framework draws on several foundational concepts in political communication to critically examine the media's portrayal of the Gaza conflict. At its core is Framing Theory, which asserts that media does not simply report reality but actively constructs it through selective emphasis, thereby shaping public understanding in ways that may align with specific political or ideological agendas. This central perspective is complemented by Public Sphere Theory (Habermas), which facilitates an examination of how social media platforms have evolved into transnational arenas for political discourse on Gaza. In parallel, Agenda-Setting Theory provides a means of analysing how certain dimensions of the conflict are elevated to prominence while others are downplayed or ignored.

Complementing these perspectives, News Diffusion Theory offers insight into the pathways through which information about the crisis circulates, as well as the credibility attached to such flows. Algorithmic Filter Bubbles Theory further contributes to the analysis by highlighting the role of platform algorithms in reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and shaping conflict-related narratives. Finally, the Propaganda Model (Chomsky & Herman) elucidates the structural mechanisms through which media content is filtered, framed, and distributed in ways that serve dominant political and economic interests. Collectively, these theoretical approaches provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how political communication processes influence the construction, dissemination, and reception of Gaza-related media narratives.

Taken together, these theories establish a multi-layered analytical framework that captures the interplay between media structures, technological platforms, and political power in shaping conflict discourse. By integrating perspectives that address both content production and

audience reception, the framework enables a nuanced examination of how narratives surrounding Gaza are constructed, amplified, and contested across traditional and digital media spheres. This integrative approach not only strengthens the analytical rigour of the study but also positions it to contribute meaningfully to broader debates on media influence, political communication, and the dynamics of information in conflict settings.

Problem Statement

The core problem addressed by this research lies in the complex and reciprocal interplay between media and politics in shaping the discourse surrounding the Israeli assault on Gaza. In contemporary conflicts, media is not merely a passive channel for information but an active arena where competing political narratives are constructed, contested, and disseminated. Both traditional outlets—such as television, newspapers, and radio—and digital platforms—such as social media networks—play decisive roles in framing events, influencing public sentiment, and shaping the policy agendas of state and non-state actors.

In the case of Gaza, this media dimension has been particularly pronounced. Israel has strategically utilised both domestic and international media to advance its official narrative, often portraying its actions as defensive measures against aggression. This framing not only influences domestic public opinion but also garners diplomatic support from key allies. Conversely, Palestinian media—operating under significant constraints such as resource scarcity, infrastructural damage, censorship, and targeted repression—seeks to counter these portrayals by highlighting civilian suffering, humanitarian crises, and violations of international law. However, its ability to influence the global narrative is often limited by asymmetries in media reach, credibility, and access to influential international networks.

This imbalance in narrative power has tangible consequences. Media framing can shape international humanitarian discourse, mobilise or dampen global public sympathy, affect the intensity of diplomatic pressure on parties to the conflict, and influence the formulation of official policy at national and international levels. Yet, despite the centrality of media in the conflict's political dynamics, there remains insufficient scholarly analysis of how these competing narratives are constructed, diffused, and received—particularly in light of the increasingly algorithm-driven digital media environment. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how political agendas are embedded within media representations and how these, in turn, impact both public perception and political decision-making in relation to Gaza.

Research Significance

Investigating the role of media under occupation is vital for several reasons. First, it illuminates how media channels are used as instruments of power—tools that can either uphold or challenge political dominance. Understanding these mechanisms is essential to improving media literacy and fostering democratic accountability in policymaking. The study also explores how media practices under occupation affect fundamental rights, including freedom of speech and access to information. It documents systemic violations faced by Palestinian journalists and the broader implications of censorship in the region.

The research contributes to reform-oriented thinking by identifying areas where both media and political systems require transformation. It underscores the importance of safeguarding media independence and emphasizes the need for ethical journalism, particularly in conflict zones. At a broader level, it aims to raise public awareness and stimulate dialogue among political elites, civil society, and international stakeholders.

Lastly, the study offers academic value by enriching the literature on media-politics interaction under occupation, providing a robust empirical base for future investigations into similar contexts. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for more nuanced analyses of how narrative control intersects with political strategy, and how media can either reinforce or resist dominant power structures.

By highlighting these interconnected dynamics, the study ultimately contributes to the pursuit of greater media transparency, political accountability, and long-term conflict resolution in one of the most volatile regions in the world.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse how historical tensions between Palestinians and Israelis have influenced the development and orientation of political media over time.
2. To investigate the reciprocal relationship between media and political processes during the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, with particular focus on the scope, patterns, and manifestations of media bias.
3. To evaluate the role of media in shaping public opinion and influencing political attitudes within the broader context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.
4. To assess the impact of the ongoing conflict on Israeli media, particularly in relation to its societal, cultural, and ideological dimensions.
5. To examine the extent to which alternative and social media platforms challenge dominant narratives and transform the media–politics relationship during the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation.

Research Questions

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Methodology

The temporal scope of this research extends from 7 October 2023—the date marking the onset of the Hamas-led "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation—through the end of 2024. This period was chosen as it encompasses the immediate and ongoing repercussions of the operation, including Israel's largescale military response, "Operation Iron Swords," which profoundly influenced both the media environment and political dynamics. Geographically, the study focuses on the Gaza Strip as a case study, providing a critical lens through which to examine the interaction between media systems and political processes under the extreme conditions of armed

conflict. Topically, the research covers a diverse range of media formats, including audiovisual content disseminated through both digital and broadcast platforms; coverage from Arab and Western news agencies reporting on the conflict; and outputs from both state-sponsored and independent media outlets that shape public discourse surrounding the aggression.

Sample Design

To ensure data diversity and analytical depth, this study employs a multi-layered sampling strategy comprising three primary components. First, the media content sample consists of 300 items systematically drawn from coverage between 7 October 2023 and 31 March 2024. This includes 100 items from Western media (e.g., CNN, BBC, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Fox News), 100 from Arab media (e.g., Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, Sky News Arabia, RT Arabic, Masr AlIkhbariya), and 100 from Israeli media (e.g., Haaretz, Yedioth Ahronoth, The Times of Israel, Channel 12). Systematic random sampling was applied to ensure representativeness across outlets and timeframes.

Second, the in-depth interviews sample consists of 15 expert participants, including six specialists in political media (academics and field professionals), five experts in international relations and Middle East affairs, and four former policymakers and diplomats with first-hand experience of the conflict. Purposive sampling was employed to prioritise diversity in expertise, political orientation, and regional background, thereby capturing a well-rounded spectrum of perspectives.

Third, the social media sample encompasses 500 posts collected from Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Using a snowball sampling technique, the process began with the most widely shared and viral posts identified through trending hashtags during the study period. This enabled the capture of high-impact content with significant audience reach. Collectively, these samples facilitate a comparative analysis of media narratives across traditional and digital platforms, as well as across different geopolitical contexts.

Data Analysis Methodology

Given the heterogeneous nature of the data, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The content analysis of media items involves coding both form-based and thematic variables, including content type, narrative framing, source credibility, key actors, and language tone. This dual coding approach enables both statistical comparison and interpretive depth.

For the in-depth interviews, thematic analysis is conducted in three phases: open coding to identify key concepts and labels; axial coding to organise these codes into broader thematic categories; and selective coding to extract core themes and compare them across participants. This process ensures that insights are systematically derived while remaining grounded in participants' own narratives.

Additionally, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is applied to both media content and selected interview excerpts to uncover discursive strategies and ideological frameworks. CDA is particularly useful in revealing how language is deployed to reinforce or contest power structures within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, thereby linking textual analysis to broader political and social contexts. The integration of these analytical methods enables a comprehensive examination of how media narratives intersect with political processes, influence public perceptions, and shape policymaking.

The combination of mixed methods, multi-layer sampling, and Critical Discourse Analysis is particularly suited to the research problem for three main reasons. First, the multi-source

sampling strategy captures the diversity of narratives across different political, cultural, and linguistic contexts, allowing for meaningful comparison. Second, the mixed-methods approach bridges quantitative precision with qualitative depth, ensuring that statistical trends are complemented by rich contextual understanding. Third, CDA provides the critical lens needed to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of media discourse, revealing how power relations are embedded in and perpetuated through language. Together, these methodological choices maximise the validity, reliability, and explanatory power of the study, enabling a nuanced and rigorous analysis of the media–politics dynamic in the context of the Gaza conflict.

Literature Review

Previous scholarship has extensively examined the interplay between media narratives and political positioning in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, revealing patterns that inform the present study. Research on the intersection of media and politics in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been extensive, yet often fragmented, focusing on specific outlets, timeframes, or aspects of discourse. Fouda (2022), for instance, investigated how Arab and Arabic-language foreign media framed Egypt's stance on the Israeli aggression against Gaza in 2021. His findings revealed a strong alignment between editorial policies and political positioning, underscoring how state or ideological affiliations directly influence narrative framing. This theme of alignment between political stance and media content reappears across several studies.

Similarly, Moumani (2021) examined Al-Manar magazine's editorial stance on Zionism before World War I, providing historical context for the roots of anti-Zionist discourse in Arab media. This early period study shows how political ideology has long shaped media output, and it offers valuable continuity for understanding contemporary coverage. Areikat and Al-Kharabsheh (2021) extended this focus on framing by exploring strategic communication on the Israeli army's official Facebook page. They found that image-based content dominated, with narrative control achieved largely through self-sourced material—highlighting the role of digital platforms in shaping perceptions during conflict.

On the other side of the spectrum, Abu Ras (2020) examined the Israeli media's influence on Arab public opinion during the 2015–2016 Palestinian uprising. The study revealed deliberate narrative shaping as a tool of soft power, showing how media can be weaponized to manage perceptions beyond national borders. Sobhi (2019) brought attention to Palestinian media's role in fostering civic engagement, demonstrating how domestic media efforts contribute to building public political consciousness in the face of occupation. Similarly, Shteiwi Bek (2019) addressed the Israeli media's portrayal of the Palestinian refugee issue, drawing on insights from Arab journalists. This research highlighted how Israel's media often seeks to downplay state responsibility while reframing the debate through fear-based messaging about demographic threats.

Together, these works reveal several recurring themes that shape the intersection of media and politics in conflict contexts. First, there is a clear alignment of editorial policies with political positioning, as noted by Fouda (2022) and Moumani (2021), indicating that media outlets often reflect or reinforce the political agendas they are aligned with. Second, scholars such as Areikat and Al-Kharabsheh (2021) and Abu Ras (2020) highlight the strategic framing and narrative control exercised through both traditional and digital platforms, underscoring the media's role as an active participant rather than a neutral observer. Third, as Sobhi (2019) observes, media narratives play a crucial role in shaping collective identity and political

consciousness, influencing how communities interpret and respond to unfolding events. Finally, Shteiwi Bek (2019) points to the deliberate reframing of sensitive issues to influence public perception, revealing how selective emphasis or omission can shift the public's understanding of a conflict.

However, these studies also share limitations—they often isolate one media platform, one actor's perspective, or a narrow time period. The present research addresses this gap by offering a comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of the media–politics relationship in the specific context of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation. By integrating qualitative interviews, content analysis, and critical discourse tools, this study captures the interplay between media practices and political agendas during a period of heightened conflict. Furthermore, it examines how these narratives influence decision-making at both local and international levels, with particular attention to censorship, bias, and the disruptive role of emerging digital platforms in challenging entrenched narratives. This integrated approach not only synthesizes the thematic insights from prior literature but also expands the analytical lens to reflect the complex, real-time dynamics of information warfare in the modern era of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Section One: Media and Politics in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

1. Historical Evolution of Media-Politics Dynamics

The relationship between media and politics in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be traced back to the late 19th century, during the emergence of the Zionist movement. Early on, Zionist leaders recognized the strategic importance of media in shaping international opinion and legitimizing Jewish immigration to Palestine. According to Adel Shadeed, an expert in Israeli affairs:

> Israeli media, almost entirely, has mobilized in service of the Israeli narrative, providing local and international legitimacy for the genocidal project in Gaza.

This insight underscores the proactive role of Israeli media in not just reporting but also reinforcing state narratives. Interviews conducted for this study indicate a transition in Israeli media discourse—from portraying Israel as a victim defending itself post-1948 to one that actively supports settlement expansion and military campaigns. Public diplomacy, or hasbara, has played a central role in this shift. As Nizar Al-Ghoul, former Director General of Programs at Palestine TV, explains:

> Since its inception, Israel has sought to frame itself as a civilized Western state in an uncivilized Eastern setting, using 'hasbara'—public diplomacy—as its tool. This strategy succeeded to some extent, particularly during the 2023 aggression, by leveraging media discourse grounded in strategic communication.

These observations are consistent with Sha'awi (2018), who argued that Israeli media systematically works to sanitize its international image and project a singular narrative of the conflict.

2. Competing Narratives and Media Framing

The research identified stark differences in how the Israeli and Palestinian sides frame the conflict. Israeli media primarily situated the events of October 7, 2023, within a "war on terror" narrative, characterizing Operation Al-Aqsa Flood as an unprovoked terrorist assault and thereby reinforcing Israel's claim to self-defense. Professor Majed Turban, former Dean of the Faculty of Media at Al-Aqsa University, observed:

Israeli media, both before and during the conflict, played a key role in framing global opinion. By demonizing Hamas, it influenced international political discourse, gaining traction among policymakers—though less so among the general public. Western platforms remained largely dominated by Israeli narratives.

Conversely, Palestinian media situated these events within a long history of occupation and blockade. As Ahmad Awadallah, a lecturer at Gaza University, noted:

> The occupation effectively appealed to European audiences by invoking religious and historical victimhood while exaggerating the resistance's capabilities. This helped craft an image of Israel as defending itself from a massive terrorist threat.

These findings align with Aksunger (2024), who highlighted the tendency of Western media to begin its coverage with October 7, thereby ignoring the broader historical context and aligning implicitly with Israeli framing.

3. The Dual Role of Media: Information and Instrument

The study highlights the dual function of media during the aggression on Gaza—as both a source of factual reporting and a tool of political influence. Journalist Ahmad Zakarnah explained:

> Media's role during the aggression was complex. On one hand, it documented events and conveyed Palestinian suffering to a global audience, thereby raising awareness. On the other hand, many international outlets presented selective narratives aligned with the interests of dominant powers, leading to distortion.

Further, Israeli media played an explicit role in dehumanizing Palestinians, often depicting them as subhuman. This rhetoric was reinforced by official statements, including one by Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant on October 9, 2023:

> We are fighting human animals, and we will act accordingly.

Such language served to justify the scale and brutality of military actions. These findings resonate with Hararah (2018), who identified the use of dehumanizing propaganda in Israeli media to delegitimize Palestinian identity and resistance.

Section Two: Media Bias and Its Impact on Public Opinion and Policy

Western Media Favoritism Toward Israeli Narratives

The study uncovered strong evidence of Western media bias in favor of the Israeli perspective, revealing a pattern of reporting that consistently shaped audience perceptions in ways favorable to Israel. This bias was evident in the strategic use of terminology, where Palestinians were frequently labeled as "terrorists" or "extremists," in contrast to Israelis who were described as "soldiers" or "civilians," thus framing one side as inherently violent and the other as legitimate or victimized. Furthermore, the prioritization of coverage played a significant role in reinforcing this imbalance, with media outlets devoting extensive attention to stories highlighting Israeli suffering, such as hostage situations or rocket attacks, while offering comparatively minimal reporting on Palestinian casualties, displacement, or humanitarian crises. Compounding these tendencies was a notable lack of historical and political context within many reports; critical issues such as the decades-long occupation, the Gaza blockade, and the broader structural inequalities underpinning the conflict were often omitted, leaving audiences with a skewed and decontextualized understanding of events. This selective framing and narrative construction not only shaped public opinion but also had the potential to influence international policy debates and diplomatic postures toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Dr. Saniyeh Al-Husseini, Professor of Political Science at Al-Quds University, remarked:

> Media might not always sway Western policymakers on Israel. However, when crimes become too apparent to ignore, public pressure builds and may affect governmental stances.

These findings mirror Castro (2024), who documented significant pro-Israel bias in U.S. newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Los Angeles Times during the early months of the war.

Censorship and Editorial Control in Western Media

The study also revealed internal dynamics within major Western media institutions that restrict balanced reporting. At CNN, journalists alleged systematic suppression of Palestinian perspectives. According to insider accounts, Israeli government statements were broadcast unchallenged, while Palestinian sources, including Hamas officials, were either ignored or deliberately excluded from coverage.

Similarly, internal leaks at the BBC suggested that post-October 7, guest vetting processes were introduced to screen out pro-Palestinian voices, a restriction not applied to pro-Israeli guests. These allegations were reinforced by an open letter from eight BBC journalists published by Al Jazeera in November 2023, which accused the organization of disproportionate sympathy for Israeli victims and a failure to provide historical context.

Media's Influence on Political Decision-Making

The study found that media significantly influenced political decisions at both national and international levels. Dr. Omar Awadallah, Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs (Palestine), emphasized:

> Media plays a critical role across all sectors—political, economic, social, and cultural. In times of crisis, it informs sound policymaking by analyzing events, identifying weaknesses, and presenting viable paths toward resolution.

Dr. Mazen Al-Ajlah, a researcher in Israeli-Palestinian affairs, pointed to the media's role in shaping global responses:

> Public opinion—molded by media—drives political action. Media coverage of the aggression on Gaza played a key role in international responses, such as South Africa's legal action against Israel at the ICJ and other countries' support for the case.

On the domestic front, Israeli media focused on reinforcing national unity by highlighting Israeli military efforts while excluding coverage of Palestinian civilian suffering. Journalist Gideon Levy of Haaretz observed:

"The average Israeli viewer doesn't see Gaza. Major Hebrew networks avoid broadcasting images of destruction or Palestinian funerals. The focus remains on glorifying Israeli soldiers and patriotic narratives."

Section Three: The Role of Alternative and Social Media in Challenging the Israeli Narrative
Alternative Media as a Counterforce to Traditional Outlets

The study's findings underscore the increasingly prominent role of alternative and social media platforms in covering the Israeli military offensive on Gaza and offering a counter-narrative to the one promoted by mainstream Israeli and Western media. Interview evidence suggests that these platforms have played a critical role in disrupting the narrative dominance of traditional media by providing space for Palestinian voices to reach global audiences, despite concerted efforts by Israel to enforce a media blackout on developments inside Gaza.

Saeed Al-Sweirki, director of the RT Arabic office in Gaza, highlighted how the events of October 7 showcased the unique power of social media in influencing public discourse:

> This war showed that social media now plays a defining role in shaping public opinion— arguably more than traditional outlets. It's fast, largely uncensored, and easily accessible through smartphones. Today's audiences want quick, visual, and to-the-point updates, and social platforms deliver exactly that—sometimes in less than a minute.

Professor Anhar Skeik, from the University of Palestine's Faculty of Media, echoed this perspective, pointing to the ethical dilemmas posed by social media's disruption of the traditional media landscape in Western contexts:

> Mobile screens have become windows to alternative realities. Unlike mainstream media in the U.S. and Europe—which initially repeated Israel's narrative of October 7 without challenge—Palestinian activists and citizen journalists were offering a live, unfiltered account on platforms like Twitter and Facebook. This real-time reporting forced audiences to confront facts that official media either downplayed or ignored.

These qualitative insights are supported by compelling quantitative data. By October 10, 2023, TikTok videos tagged with #Palestine had reached approximately 27.8 billion views, outpacing #Israel content, which stood at around 23 billion. Additionally, a report from Israeli analytics firm Humanz noted that during the month of October 2023, roughly 109.6 billion pro-Palestinian hashtagged posts were shared across TikTok and Instagram, compared to just 7.39 billion in favor of Israel—a stark 15-to-1 imbalance.

Obstacles Confronting Alternative Media: Suppression and Disinformation

While alternative media succeeded in amplifying marginalized voices and offering a compelling counter-narrative, it also faced substantial challenges:

Censorship of Palestinian Content

Major platforms like Facebook and Instagram—both under Meta—were reported to have systematically restricted pro-Palestinian content. Activist Rana Al-Kilani revealed that her accounts were removed over 20 times:

> Facebook deleted a significant number of my posts exposing occupation crimes, justifying it by claiming they violated community standards around incitement and violent imagery.

This aligns with a December 2023 Human Rights Watch report, which documented over 1,050 instances of deleted or suppressed pro-Palestinian content during October and November—compared to only a single known case involving pro-Israel content.

The Spread of Disinformation

The study also noted a sharp rise in misinformation, originating from both sides of the conflict. According to The New York Times, social media saw an "unprecedented wave of propaganda and fake news," with an estimated 25% of early posts related to the conflict traced to bots or fake accounts.

Lack of Strategic Coordination

Several interviewees emphasized the fragmented nature of Palestinian media efforts. As Professor Ahmad Awadallah explained:

> Alternative media has become the Palestinians' primary tool to bypass restrictions and mobilize global support. But the absence of a coordinated media strategy often results in scattered, reactive efforts rather than a cohesive message.

Shaping International Public Opinion

The findings make clear that alternative media has had a powerful impact on shaping global perceptions and mobilizing solidarity with Palestinians. This influence was evident in large-scale protests across major cities, grassroots boycott movements, and mounting public pressure on political institutions.

Mamoun Sweidan, an advisor to the Palestinian president, attested to this influence:

> Even under heavy restrictions by the occupation, digital platforms succeeded in exposing the reality of the war on Gaza to the world. Visual media allowed people globally to witness the atrocities as they unfolded, fueling widespread outrage and condemnation—even from governments historically supportive of Israel.

These conclusions are consistent with Khamis (2024), who argues that social media has played a decisive role in shaping global perspectives on the Gaza war. In many cases, user-generated content has had a greater impact than official reporting by mainstream outlets.

Section Four: The Impact of Media Discourse on Domestic and International Levels

1. The Influence of Media Discourse on the Israeli Domestic Sphere

The study's findings emphasize the central role of Israeli media in shaping and mobilizing domestic public opinion in support of military actions in Gaza. This influence unfolded across three interconnected dimensions:

1.1 Political Mobilization and Public Consensus

From the early stages of the conflict, Israeli media largely echoed the official state narrative. It framed military operations as acts of "self-defense" while systematically delegitimizing Palestinian resistance. This alignment with government discourse helped foster a sense of national unity and provided rhetorical and political justification for continued aggression.

1.2 Dehumanization of Palestinians

The data also reveal that Israeli media engaged in deliberate portrayals that stripped Palestinians— particularly Gaza's civilian population—of their humanity. By casting them either as terrorists or as inherently threatening, these narratives normalized the targeting of civilians and softened public resistance to military escalation.

1.3 Suppression of Critical Perspectives

Dissenting or oppositional voices within Israeli society were either marginalized or silenced altogether. The narrowing of permissible discourse significantly reduced the space for internal critique or public questioning of state policy.

In this context, Israeli affairs researcher Adil Shadeed remarked:

> As long as the media provides legal and moral justification, Gaza remains a legitimate target. The Israeli political elite feels insulated and is indifferent to the specific details of the crimes being committed. The absence of critical voices has emboldened continued aggression.

These observations align with Al-Nuaimi (2004), who argued that Israeli media often functions in close coordination with the military establishment, reinforcing a security-oriented narrative that legitimizes violent action.

2. The Role of Media Discourse on the International Stage

The study also identifies the powerful impact of media discourse in shaping global perceptions and influencing international political dynamics. This was particularly evident in three key areas:

2.1 Dominance of the Israeli Narrative in Western Media

Major Western media outlets were initially quick to adopt and amplify the Israeli narrative, heavily emphasizing the notion of Israel's "right to self-defense." As Adil Shadeed pointed out:

> Zionist actors and lobbying groups have significant influence over these institutions—whether through financial ties or through individuals embedded within them.

2.2 Political Legitimacy and Diplomatic Endorsement

This media framing contributed to reinforcing the political legitimacy of the Israeli government on the international stage. It provided decision-makers—especially in the West—with a rhetorical framework that justified continued diplomatic and military support for Israel.

2.3 The Counterweight of Public Opinion

Nonetheless, the widespread dissemination of images and reports detailing civilian suffering in Gaza—particularly through nontraditional and social media—sparked international outrage. This, in turn, compelled some governments to express concern or call for restraint, even if such statements remained largely symbolic.

Professor Majid Turban, former Dean of the Faculty of Media at Al-Aqsa University, noted:

> We succeeded in rallying global humanitarian sentiment. However, our efforts fell short in achieving sustained political backing due to competing regional and international interests. Meanwhile, Israeli media leveraged financial influence and lobbying to secure elite political support worldwide.

These conclusions are consistent with the findings of Areikat and Al-Kharabsheh (2021), who emphasized that Israeli media employs strategic framing techniques to shape international discourse and win the favor of key policymakers.

3. The Partial Success of Palestinian Media in Communicating the People's Suffering

Despite facing considerable obstacles, Palestinian media succeeded—albeit partially—in exposing the realities of the occupation and documenting the suffering of the Palestinian people. This success manifested across several dimensions:

3.1 Documentation and Exposure of Violations

Palestinian journalists and media outlets made sustained efforts to document human rights violations via satellite broadcasts and digital platforms. This content played an essential role in conveying the reality of the situation to international audiences.

3.2 Targeting of Journalists and the Assault on Truth

The study confirms that Palestinian media professionals and institutions were directly targeted by Israeli forces, severely hampering their ability to report freely and safely. This targeting constituted not only a physical threat but also a broader attack on the freedom of information.

3.3 Strategic Gaps and Technical Limitations

A key challenge identified in the study is the absence of a unified Palestinian media strategy. Poor coordination, limited infrastructure, and intermittent access to the internet—especially during military operations—further weakened media effectiveness.

3.4 The Growing Role of Alternative Media

Alternative and social media platforms helped mitigate some of these challenges by offering a powerful channel for real-time reporting and grassroots communication. These platforms proved vital in rallying international solidarity and countering dominant media narratives.

Adil Shadeed reflected on this development:

Alternative media broke through the constraints of partisan networks, giving rise to a wave of international solidarity that traditional Israeli media could not suppress. However, to maintain this momentum, more strategic professionalism is urgently needed.

Key Findings

Drawing from qualitative interviews and secondary data sources, the study concludes that media discourse—both traditional and alternative—has played a decisive role in framing narratives, mobilizing public sentiment, and shaping political outcomes at domestic, regional, and global levels. Israeli media has largely functioned as an instrument to reinforce official state narratives, often aligning closely with government positions and minimizing coverage of dissenting voices within Israeli society. This alignment has contributed to the legitimization of state policies, the framing of military actions as defensive necessities, and the marginalization of narratives that challenge the dominant political agenda. In contrast, Palestinian media, while operating under severe structural and political constraints such as censorship, limited resources, and restricted access to international platforms, has nevertheless demonstrated significant capacity to humanize the conflict. By highlighting the lived experiences of civilians, documenting human rights violations, and leveraging emotional storytelling, Palestinian outlets have created counternarratives that contest the dominant Israeli framing.

Despite these systemic challenges, Palestinian media has found particular success in harnessing the power of social platforms to bypass traditional gatekeepers and reach global audiences directly. The rise of citizen journalism, viral imagery, and real-time video documentation has amplified the visibility of the human cost of the conflict, influencing not only public opinion but also advocacy movements, humanitarian campaigns, and diplomatic debates worldwide. This dynamic media environment has thus produced an asymmetrical yet impactful discursive battleground in which both sides actively compete for legitimacy and international sympathy. While Israeli media benefits from greater institutional resources and global media alignment, Palestinian media's strategic use of digital tools has ensured that its perspective, particularly on issues of occupation, displacement, and civilian suffering, remains present in the international consciousness. Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews and secondary sources, the study's core insights are summarized in the following table, which captures the comparative strengths, challenges, and global influence of Israeli and Palestinian media narratives.

Table 1
Summary of the Study's Findings

Theme	Key Findings
☐ Relationship between Media and ☐ Politics	Mobilization of Israeli media in support of the official narrative and legitimization of aggression on Gaza
	Israeli media's use of 'Hasbara' strategy to improve its international image

☐		Contrasting framing of the conflict between the Palestinian and Israeli narratives
☐ ☐	Media Bias and Its Impact	Clear bias in major Western media outlets favoring the Israeli narrative
		Internal pressure and censorship within Western media institutions
☐		The Impact of Media on Political Decision-Making at the Domestic and International Levels
☐ ☐	Role of alternative media	Success of alternative media in breaking the monopoly of traditional media on the narrative
		Censorship of Palestinian content on social media platforms
☐		Spread of misinformation by both sides
☐		Significant influence of alternative media on global public opinion
☐ ☐	Impact of Media Discourse	Mobilization of Israeli public opinion in support of military operations
		Initial adoption of the Israeli narrative by Western media
☐		Partial success of Palestinian media in conveying the suffering of the Palestinian people
☐		Direct targeting of Palestinian journalists and media institutions

Discussion of Findings

Media as an Instrument of Power and Narrative Construction

Media as a Mechanism for Propaganda and Mobilization

The study's findings provide compelling evidence that media has been a decisive instrument in shaping public perception, sustaining propaganda, and mobilizing sentiment during the Israeli assault on Gaza. This influence is consistent with the principles of Framing Theory, which explains how media outlets strategically highlight certain aspects of reality to cultivate specific interpretations and emotional responses. In this case, Israeli media predominantly adopted a securitized "war on terror" frame, portraying the events of October 7 as an existential threat to national security and positioning military retaliation as both necessary and justified. This framing effectively dehumanized Palestinian actors, casting them solely as aggressors while sidelining the humanitarian implications of Israel's military response. Conversely, Palestinian media challenged this securitized narrative by situating the violence within the broader historical continuum of occupation, displacement, and the Gaza blockade, thereby drawing

attention to the structural roots of the conflict and framing Palestinian actions as resistance within an asymmetrical struggle.

These interpretations strongly align with the conclusions drawn by Abu Shanab (2017), whose research on the 2014 Gaza war revealed that Israeli media employed a highly propagandistic discourse aimed at legitimizing state policies and delegitimizing Palestinian resistance. Abu Shanab's findings also underscore the systematic marginalization of Palestinian voices within mainstream Israeli coverage, where narratives of Palestinian suffering were often absent or reframed to fit the state's security agenda. In parallel, Palestinian media—though constrained by limited resources, censorship, and infrastructural challenges—demonstrated resilience in amplifying the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and fostering transnational solidarity, particularly through the strategic use of social media. The consistency between the current study and earlier scholarship highlights the enduring nature of media asymmetry in the Israeli– Palestinian conflict, as well as the persistent role of framing in shaping both domestic and international political outcomes.

The Power of Language and Media Terminology

Another significant finding of the study concerns the strategic deployment of language and terminology as a tool of ideological framing. The analysis reveals that Western media outlets consistently adopted stigmatizing and delegitimizing terms when describing Palestinians, often framing them as aggressors, extremists, or security threats, while using more neutral—or at times even sympathetic—vocabulary to characterize Israeli actions. This linguistic asymmetry effectively reinforced dominant pro-Israeli narratives and influenced audience perceptions in ways that obscured the power imbalance at the heart of the conflict. Israeli media, for its part, frequently engaged in overtly dehumanizing rhetoric, exemplified by the Israeli Defense Minister's infamous description of Palestinians as "humans who act like animals." Such language not only strips the targeted group of moral legitimacy but also serves to normalize and justify state violence in the eyes of domestic and international audiences.

These observations are consistent with the findings of Kozman (2023), whose research demonstrated that Western news headlines frequently adopted biased linguistic frames—presenting Israeli military violence as defensive, reactive, or couched in ambiguous terms, while portraying Palestinian resistance using explicitly negative, criminalizing, or terror-related terminology. This framing bias functions as a subtle but powerful form of agenda-setting, shaping not only the interpretation of events but also the moral judgments and policy preferences of global publics. In the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, such patterns of discourse have farreaching implications, influencing everything from humanitarian aid debates to the legitimacy of international legal interventions.

The Divide Between Traditional and Alternative Media

The study also reveals a pronounced divergence between traditional mainstream media and alternative or digital platforms in their coverage of the Gaza conflict. Established outlets, particularly in the West, frequently echoed state-sanctioned narratives, often framing events through the lens of official government statements or military press releases. This narrative framing tended to downplay or marginalize Palestinian perspectives, limiting the scope of contextual analysis and omitting the historical and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict. In doing so, mainstream coverage often reinforced geopolitical biases and perpetuated selective storytelling that aligned with dominant political interests.

By contrast, alternative and digital platforms—ranging from independent news websites to grassroots citizen journalism on social media—emerged as more immediate, dynamic, and unfiltered channels of information. These platforms provided ground-level accounts, live updates, and visual evidence that directly challenged mainstream narratives. In particular, they amplified voices that were otherwise excluded from global discourse, thereby fostering greater awareness and empathy among international audiences. The speed and accessibility of these digital channels allowed them to shape public opinion in real time, influencing both grassroots activism and policy debates.

However, the democratization of information through digital platforms also introduced significant challenges. The absence of traditional editorial oversight made these spaces fertile ground for the rapid circulation of unverified content, disinformation, and propaganda. This environment blurred the boundaries between factual reporting and opinion-driven narratives, complicating efforts to establish a shared reality of events on the ground. Khamis and Dogbatse (2024) reinforce this conclusion, noting that social media often stepped in to fill the informational void left by traditional journalism, offering an essential counter-narrative to official accounts while simultaneously grappling with the credibility and verification issues inherent in a decentralized media ecosystem. Zionist Lobby Influence on Western Media Landscapes

One of the more politically charged findings relates to the significant influence of Zionist lobbying groups on Western media coverage of the Gaza conflict. This influence extends beyond occasional interventions and instead operates as a structural factor within the media ecosystem. Lobbying organizations have long maintained close ties with political elites, think tanks, and influential editorial boards, enabling them to shape narratives at both the policy and journalistic levels. These relationships are reinforced by shared geopolitical objectives between Israel and its Western allies, particularly in the United States and parts of Europe, where strategic partnerships in defense, intelligence, and trade underpin a strong political alignment. As a result, media institutions often adopt editorial positions that are consistent with state and lobby narratives, even if they diverge from on-the-ground realities.

The mechanisms through which this influence is exerted are multifaceted. In some cases, lobbying groups directly engage with journalists and editors, providing them with press kits, background briefings, and "expert" sources that frame events in ways favorable to Israel. In other instances, the pressure is more indirect, arising from the fear of reputational damage, accusations of antisemitism, or loss of access to political figures and information channels. The cumulative effect is a subtle yet powerful shaping of what is deemed newsworthy, how headlines are crafted, and which images or quotes are amplified. This often results in the privileging of Israeli security concerns while minimizing, obscuring, or delegitimizing Palestinian suffering, resistance, and political aspirations.

These observations are consistent with Hassan's (2024) research, which found that in an overwhelmingly pro-Israeli media landscape, Al Jazeera stood out as one of the few major outlets consistently providing a more balanced representation of the Palestinian narrative. Hassan attributes this to Al Jazeera's relative independence from Western political structures and its commitment to amplifying voices from the Global South. However, even in the case of Al Jazeera, coverage is not immune to external pressures, as seen in diplomatic pushback and calls to limit its access in certain Western jurisdictions. Together, these dynamics illustrate how media bias is not simply the result of individual prejudice or editorial oversight but is

instead embedded in a broader network of political influence, lobbying power, and institutional alignment.

Systematic Targeting of Palestinian Journalists and Media Outlets

The research also brings attention to the systematic targeting of Palestinian journalists and media institutions by Israeli forces, which significantly hindered the operational capacity of Palestinian media during the conflict. This pattern of attacks extended beyond the immediate dangers of war reporting and appeared to be part of a broader strategy aimed at silencing local voices capable of documenting the realities on the ground. The destruction of media offices, confiscation of equipment, and restrictions on journalists' movement further exacerbated the difficulties faced by Palestinian reporters in fulfilling their professional duties. According to the Committee to Protect

Journalists (CPJ), 128 journalists and media professionals were killed in the first year of the war— 123 of whom were Palestinian—underscoring the disproportionate toll borne by the local press.

The consequences of such actions were profound, not only in terms of human loss but also in shaping the informational landscape of the conflict. The decimation of Palestinian media infrastructure severely limited the ability of local outlets to provide timely, credible, and independent coverage, thereby creating a vacuum that was quickly filled by external narratives, many of which reflected Israeli or Western framing. This dynamic further entrenched asymmetries in global media coverage, where Palestinian experiences were either underrepresented or filtered through foreign correspondents who lacked full access to affected areas. The silencing of these voices thus had both immediate operational impacts and long-term implications for historical documentation and accountability.

These findings corroborate evidence collected by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which filed multiple complaints to the International Criminal Court (ICC), alleging that these attacks constitute war crimes targeting the free press in Gaza. RSF has argued that deliberate targeting of journalists not only violates international humanitarian law but also undermines the principle of press freedom as enshrined in numerous international treaties. By systematically obstructing the work of Palestinian media, such actions contribute to an environment where impunity prevails, and where narratives of the conflict are shaped largely by those with the resources and geopolitical leverage to dominate global information flows. This raises urgent questions about the role of international legal mechanisms in protecting journalists in active conflict zones and ensuring accountability for violations committed against them.

The findings reveal a deliberate and systematic targeting of Palestinian journalists and media institutions by Israeli forces, severely undermining the operational capacity of Palestinian media during the Gaza conflict. The Committee to Protect Journalists documented 128 deaths among journalists and media professionals in the first year of the war—123 of them Palestinian— indicating the disproportionate vulnerability faced by local media workers. This reality underscores the broader power asymmetry at play in the conflict, where information control becomes as strategically important as territorial control. The silencing of Palestinian voices through the destruction of infrastructure and the loss of human capital directly limits the ability of Palestinian media to present counter-narratives to the dominant Israeli framing.

These patterns corroborate evidence compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), which has filed multiple complaints with the International Criminal Court, alleging that such attacks amount to war crimes against the free press in Gaza. From the perspective of the study's

research objectives—particularly the aim to examine how structural and political pressures shape media narratives—these incidents highlight the intersection of military strategy and media suppression. By impairing the capacity of Palestinian journalists to operate, these actions do not merely represent collateral damage but function as part of a deliberate strategy to control the flow of information and weaken international awareness of the humanitarian crisis.

In relation to the research question concerning the role of political actors in shaping media coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the targeting of journalists represents a tangible manifestation of that influence—not through editorial boards or lobbying channels, but through direct, physical elimination of alternative sources of information. This aligns with the broader objective of assessing how political and power structures, including military operations, intersect with media ecosystems to influence global perceptions of the conflict. Ultimately, these findings reveal that media freedom in Gaza is not only a question of professional independence but also one of physical survival, with profound implications for the diversity and accuracy of narratives reaching the international public sphere.

Recommendations

Academically, this study underscores the need for deeper interdisciplinary research on the intersection of media, conflict, and diplomacy, particularly the role of non-state actors in shaping global narratives during asymmetric conflicts. Future studies should employ comparative analyses between Palestinian media strategies and those used in other conflict zones to identify transferable best practices. Longitudinal research could also explore how sustained digital media campaigns influence diplomatic discourse and policy-making at international forums over time. Additionally, more systematic scholarly attention should be given to documenting and analysing the targeting of journalists as both a human rights violation and a tactic of information suppression. This line of inquiry would not only contribute to media studies and political communication scholarship but also support evidence-based advocacy in international legal and policy arenas.

Based on the findings, a unified Palestinian media strategy is essential to counter entrenched biases in global coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This strategy should leverage alternative and social media platforms to amplify Palestinian voices and narratives at the international level. To strengthen the operational capacity of Palestinian journalism, targeted investments should be made in media training, with an emphasis on digital journalism, multimedia content production, and multilingual outreach to engage diverse global audiences more effectively. Cross-media collaborations between Palestinian, Arab, and independent international outlets should be encouraged to coordinate fact-based reporting and counter misinformation. Furthermore, robust

legal advocacy at the international level is critical to protect journalists from targeted violence, while independent monitoring mechanisms should be established to document bias, misinformation, and narrative manipulation in real time. Media literacy campaigns among Palestinian and Arab publics are also necessary to foster critical engagement with media content and strengthen resilience against propaganda.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the relationship between media and politics during the Israeli aggression on Gaza was both symbiotic and strategic. Media functioned as a powerful agent in

shaping public attitudes and legitimizing policy, while political interests and pressures simultaneously influenced how media outlets framed the conflict.

The evidence reveals a pronounced bias within major Western news organizations in favor of the Israeli narrative, effectively sidelining Palestinian perspectives. However, alternative media platforms—particularly social media—proved to be critical in disrupting this dominance and in amplifying grassroots narratives that resonated with global audiences.

The findings also underscore the role of media in cultivating political support for military operations within Israeli society, particularly by reinforcing dehumanizing tropes about Palestinians and legitimizing violence as self-defense.

Given the persistent challenges facing Palestinian media—including censorship, fragmentation, and direct targeting—the study stresses the urgency of developing a robust and strategic Palestinian media infrastructure. Such an effort must prioritize professional development, global outreach, and narrative consistency to ensure the Palestinian voice is heard, validated, and defended in international discourse.

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